



Inspect Furnace Before the Chill

By NICK HARDER , The Orange County Register

Even though warm weather is still with us, it's a good time to inspect your gas-burning forced-air furnace to get ready for the heating season. In fact, some of the same steps you take to get your furnace ready for cold weather are the ones you'd take to maintain it for any remaining hot days when you'd use it to power your central air conditioning. Even if you have no intention of inspecting – let alone maintaining – the furnace yourself, it would help you to know what needs to be done when you hire someone.

- Perhaps the first thing that should be done by you or anyone you hire is to remove anything around the furnace that would hamper its ability to draw air. Without sufficient air flow, the furnace works that much harder, requires more energy to run and therefore costs you more money.
- Next, turn off your furnace. If you've been running it for awhile, make sure the blower stops before the inspection starts.
- Lift or slide out the blower- compartment cover at the front of the furnace.
- Examine the compartment. It's probably dirty, as is the air filter.
- Remove the air filter and clean it (if it's that type) or replace it. Air filters almost certainly will need to be cleaned or replaced at the start of each heating and air-conditioning season. A dirty air filter will cause the furnace to work harder, taking a toll on its longevity and costing you more money every month to keep it going. Make a note of the size of the filter, if you can read it on the old one. If you can't and will buy the filter yourself, measure its length, width and thickness so you can buy a new one easily.
- With the filter removed, the blower compartment will need to be cleaned. A vacuum cleaner with hose attachments may be used to remove dirt and dust.
- Set your thermostat on "Heat." Set the temperature gauge well above room temperature so the system turns on. Use two of your senses – hearing and smell – to judge whether the system is working properly. If you're hearing mechanical noises that don't seem to be part of the regular workings of the system, that could indicate a problem. So, too, would any strange odors indicate a problem. (Note that the heating system may have a slight musty odor for a short time and that is not unusual when it has not been used for months.
- After you've turned your furnace heating system on for awhile, pay particular attention to any flu-like symptoms you or members of your family might feel. It could indicate escaping carbon monoxide. If so, immediately turn off the system and open your home's windows to air out. Then call your local heating/cooling contractor. In many areas, your local gas company will send someone out to inspect your furnace for free if you request it. Any maintenance and repair will be up to you, though.

